THE MOONSHINERS OF GOTHAM

ASK A REVENUE AGENT TO GUESS, AND HE'LL SAY THERE MAY BE FIFTY MOONSHINE STILLS OPERATING IN NEW YORK TO-DAY.

Greeley Photo Service.

RAIDING moonshine stills isn't a diversion confined wholly to the mountain districts of the South. It can be done, and quite successfully, too, right here in New York. Here's how it usually happens:

"Dear Sir," begins a letter addresed to Colonel L. G. Nutt, revenue agent in charge of the district of New York. "I think you ought to know what's going on in the cellar of No. — East Houston Street. The man who lives on the first floor rear is making moonshine whiskey there and selling it to the saloons along the river front. Sometimes my wife and I see him carrying away a big jugful of it."

Having digested this and made a mental note of the absence of any street address or other means of identification of the writer, who signs himself "A Friend," Colonel Nutt sighs and pushes the button of an electric bell. Into his private office steps a man who looks as little like the revenue agent of moonshine fact and fiction as could be imagined. He's smoking a cigar. All revenue agents smoke cigars, it seems, perhaps because they know where to pick out the good ones.

"Jones," says the chief agent, "have we cut any stills lately?"

"Cutting" a still is revenue office jargon for destroying one.

"Not for more than a week, sir," replies Jones. "I didn't cut that French one we turned up in Brownsville. It must have been worth $500, and was such a fine specimen I'm saving it to send it to the department. I've never seen one like it in this country."

"Well, here's a letter from a man who thinks he'd like to earn $50. See what you can make out of it."

"Very well, sir," says Jones.

Perhaps an hour later, perhaps in the next week or not for a month, an automobile rolls up to the curb at No. — East Houston Street and five men get out. There are that many because nobody knows what they're likely to find themselves up against.

Chances are there'll be no trouble. New York moonshiners, like their brothers of the mountains of Virginia, would a whole lot rather run than fight, the polite little fiction that credits a mountaineer with a bloodthirsty "better-die-than-be-captured" spirit to the contrary notwithstanding. There are fights in the South because the moonshiners often find themselves in a position to shoot and run—a little privilege denied the New Yorker by the very nature of the territory in which he operates.

A New York moonshiner fears the revenue agents mostly because he knows they will destroy his still if they find it. Often the stills in this section of the country, unlike the homemade, sometimes-copper-more-often-zinc contraptions of the South, cost $300 or $400. He doesn't mind paying a fine of a hundred or two, but he hates to lose that still.

In none of their raids have the New York agents come across what they call a "copper kettle" still, which depends upon the old-fashioned worm, cold water and steam for distillation. Those hereabouts are of the continuous process, chambered variety, such as are in use in legitimate distilleries throughout the country. Steam is produced by a gas flame instead of by an open wood fire.

The distillation of spirits is absurdly simple—so simple, in fact, that the anti-prohibitionists tell us we'll be making our own moonshine in little tin stills on our kitchen stoves if the prohibitionists have their way.

Ask a revenue agent to guess and he'll probably say there may be fifty moonshine stills operating in New York to-day, mostly on the East Side and in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. It is impossible to find them and the agents don't trouble to look for them. When one is "turned up" and "cut" there is pretty sure to be an informer somewhere in the background.

The Federal statute allows a fee of $50 to the informer upon conviction of the offender he has exposed. Down South they pay less per head, because it was found when the fee was $50 that the moonshiners, who couldn't raise or buy enough corn for a "run" of whiskey, were exchanging jail courtesies. Which is to say that one of them would rig up a burned out still, and another would go to the nearest revenue agent and reveal its location. The raid and subsequent arrest resulted in a jail term varying from thirty days to six months—probably the former, when the agent was obliged to admit in court that the still was a very small one.

Thirty days in jail for $50 split two ways was profitable enough financially in the dull season, especially when it came time for turn about, and the original "informer" posed as the moonshiner, while the "moonshiner" turned informer and made his partner do the heavies.

H. B. Taylor, Colonel Nutt's chief lieutenant, has had years of experience with the Southern moonshiners. An informer he had every reason to trust turned up five small stills for him in one night, every one of which Taylor found to be burned out.

"John," he said, "you haven't played fair with me on this. You've planted these stills. I'm not going to pay you a cent."

John said not a word, but after Taylor had gone he wrote complaining letters to Washington. Nothing ever came of them, but the next time Taylor went into John's territory to raid a still—a real one—somebody fired from ambush and the horse of the man who rode next to Taylor fell dead beneath him. Another man got a bullet between his eyes.

Even when he is caught running a still the real moonshiner accepts his fate with nonchalance.

"I ain't askeered," is his philosophy. "I ain't never seed a revenue agent could do more 'an kill me, an' if he kills me he kain't eat me, so what's he got?"

The New York agents have to fear no bullets. City moonshiners aren't even gunmen. Oftentimes what appears to an inquisitive neighbor to be an illicit still is nothing of the sort. The agents frequently find the supposed moonshiner is an East Side saloon owner, blending his own whiskey to escape paying the $100 fee the government demands as a yearly license. He takes several gallons of good whiskey and several more gallons that are no good at all, and mixes them to make a potion calculated to be sold as good at a handsome profit.

On scores of occasions, however, the anonymous information has led to a sure enough "cut" of a still with a capacity of 8,000 to 10,000 gallons at a run. Fruit or grape sugar is used in combination with common compressed yeast, such as the housewife uses for her bread, and the product is a fair, though unmistakable, imitation of brandy.

When the product is run off it is carried in one, five or ten gallon packages to waterfront saloons, where it is sold at a price insuring an enormous profit to moonshiner and saloonkeeper alike. The ultimate sufferer seems to be the ultimate consumer, who for five cents a "pony" gets 150 proof spirits with which to scorch his innards.

One hundred and fifty proof spirits contain a kick just about 70 points above par. The legitimate bottled whiskey of barroom consumption seldom runs above 80 or 90 proof, so the man who takes the five-cent kind, if he's in search of a jolt in his drink, is usually accommodated.

It is impossible for the New York moonshiner, even with apparatus vastly superior to that of his Southern rival, to turn out brandy that does not bear the earmarks of moonshine. A revenue officer needs but to smell it to tell that the fusel oil and high alcohols have not been refined out of it.

It is aged, too, a good deal like the Union prisoners at Andersonville used to age the moonshine whiskey they made. You remember the story:

"We made three quarts," said one of the moonshiners, "but the guards stole two of them. We had to hide the other one to age it."

"How long did you age it?" inquired the patient listener.

"Two days," said the soldier.

Once the city moonshiner gets his product into the hands of the saloonkeeper he is safe. That worthy bandit puts it in nicely labelled bottles proving that it was distilled in France or Italy, or some other country it never saw, and even if the agents find a dozen bottles of it they have no way of tracing its manufacture.

The New York moonshiner generally works on the top floor of a tenement house, or sometimes even a loft building, so that the fumes of distillation are dispersed in the air. He makes from ten to twenty times as much brandy as his mountain counterpart does whiskey, because he has ten or twenty times as many places to dispose of it. He sells through fences, just as thieves do, and the product is often introduced into the gullet of the consumer in one or five or six saloons owned by the same man but conducted under various names.

There is no moonshine whiskey made in New York for several reasons. In the first place, the water isn't suited to its manufacture. Chemists can't explain to the satisfaction of a layman what's the matter with it, but it won't do. In the second place, nobody wants to drink it. Even the Scandinavian stevedore, whose favorite tipple is straight alcohol, turns up his nose at its pungent odor and spurns its peculiarly retroactive kick. It can be colored, of course, with burnt sugar and made fairly palatable, but the aroma remains.

WILL THE DEUTSCHLAND GET BACK TO HER HOME PORT?

"We Will Clear and Announce Our Departure Like Any Other Merchantman," Her Captain Asserts

It Should Be Easy for a Periscope the Size of Your Hat to Pass Through a Fifty-Mile Gateway

(Specially written for The Tribune Magazine by T. J. Ross, staff correspondent of The Tribune at Baltimore.)

THERE is just one popular topic of discussion in maritime circles these days—just one favorite betting proposition among amateurs and professionals of the sea. Every old sea-dog in the ship chandleries along the coast interrupts a puff on his corn-cob pipe to ask his matie the same stirring question—Will the Deutschland get back to her home port?

Some day, probably during the current week, this sea-green submersible will glide out of her berth on the Patapsco River, sail down Chesapeake Bay to where the Virginia Capes form a gate to the broad Atlantic and dash for the open sea. The game will be on. The hare will be prey for the hounds if they catch her.

There can be only one of three denouements to the half-finished exploit of this modern Nautilus, but the odds are in favor of the successful completion of the voyage home. The Deutschland may win out. Her skipper believers it will be easy to accomplish, and any one who has talked to the sea-tanned submarine master, who piloted his wonder-craft on the pioneer undersea freight-carrying trip that history records, realizes that his is no idle boast.

But what if the vessel fails? That's the fascinating feature of the enterprise. Suppose she never returns to the expectant populace of Bremen to receive the plaudits of a whole nation. It is well within the range of possibility that the Deutschland may be caught by a British man-o'-war and towed to an enemy port. She would be the proudest prize of the war, no doubt. Then again she may never be heard from again after she drops her pilot in Hampton Roads and bids farewell to American shores.

Some think it was just plain luck that brought the submarine to Baltimore in safety. But it was scarcely that only, even if one disregards for the moment the German genius that devised a capable craft and executed the initial steps in the trading enterprise she represents. One could not talk with Captain Paul Koenig, skipper of the Deutschland, and hear him tell ever so modestly how he and his crew drank champagne and sang to the strains of a phonograph far below the waters of the English Channel while hostile warships raged above him and still believe it was good fortune alone than won for him success.

"We will get home safely," this captain asserts so determinedly that one must believe him. "We will clear and announce our departure like any other merchantman—then we will go out. Six, ten, a dozen cruisers may be outside the territorial waters of the United States, but they will not stop us. It will be easy. A submarine, you know, always sees another vessel first. She never lets herself be seen."

That is Captain Koenig's creed, and experienced mariners in the Chesapeake waters feel certain that he can carry out his intention with no more danger of failure than he experienced coming to America. When he guides his craft out between Cape Henry and Cape Charles, he will have before him a fifty mile gate-way to cross the three-mile limit. Then the broad Atlantic is his for whatever chase may wait for him. It seems a certainty though that the Deutschland could glide out past the territorial line right under the keel of a waiting warship and never be seen by enemy eyes.

The character of the vessel itself is its best assurance of a safe journey home. It sees the enemy before the enemy sees it. It can submerge in one minute, the skipper maintains, and lie on the bottom indefinitely if needs be or stay suspended beneath the waves for four days without rising to the surface to recharge the batteries. The fact that it is so easily submerged and can remain undersea so long is the strongest factor in favor of the craft.

On the other hand, aside from capture or destruction by a hostile warship, the greatest peril lies in the possibility of a mechanical failure. The United States naval experts who examined the interior of the Deutschland marvelled at her mechanism. Her two Diesel engines, of 500 horsepower each, and all their complementary apparatus excited wonder in their eyes. And they learned, too, that tucked away in some snug place on board is a duplicate of every important part of the submarine's complex machinery.

Even while she is running on the surface of the water it is difficult to see the Deutschland at any considerable distance away. With her cargo capacity of 900 tons taken up she draws seventeen feet of water, and that line marks a change in the color of the lower part of her hulk—a battleship gray—to a perfect sea-green. Her whole superstructure is painted that color. It matches the sea by design, and the match is a good one.

Anyone familiar with Chesapeake Bay and its opening to the ocean sees readily why Captain Koenig does not fear that his departure may become known. To traverse the 175 miles from Baltimore Harbor on the Patapsco River to Old Point Comfort, which is about opposite the middle point in the gateway between Cape Henry and Cape Charles, judging by the voyage up the bay last Sunday, will take the skipper about fifteen hours. The captain can go all the way on the surface or submerge before he reaches Hampton Roads as the humor strikes him.

It will be a simple matter so to calculate his clearance of the port of Baltimore to arrive at a point inside the Virginia Capes at night. And suppose he takes a notion not to submerge. He would not have to. He could sail right out beyond the three mile limit and not even a fleet of vessels in Hampton Roads, let alone a few hostile cruisers off coast, would know that he had left unless they stretched themselves in a chain across the mouth of the bay and watched for him to pass.

A periscope the size of a hat—figuratively speaking—is not an easy thing to sight in broad daylight. Suppose an agent of the Allies followed the Deutschland and her escort, the tug Thomas F. Timmins, down the Chesapeake from Baltimore. Captain Koenig could have almost as much fun as he had with the British men-o'-war in the English Channel. When he reached the broad end of the bay, he could fill up his water tanks, sing out a merry "ha ha" to his pursuers and disappear beneath the waves. Then who could pick him up or say whether he had taken to the Atlantic or was playing his phonograph at the bottom of the bay?

So much for getting out. As Captain Koenig confidently remarks: "It is easy." And when the Deutschland glides over the three-mile limit or under it, as the case may be, what enemy ship is going to find her by design? It is then that luck will play a hand in the game. Captain Koenig's creed, "We just sink when we see something," if carried out is protection against even luck playing favorite to the enemy craft. But suppose that the submarine trader is overhauled. How will the submarine romance end?

A few days ago Captain Koenig was asked by The Tribune correspondent:

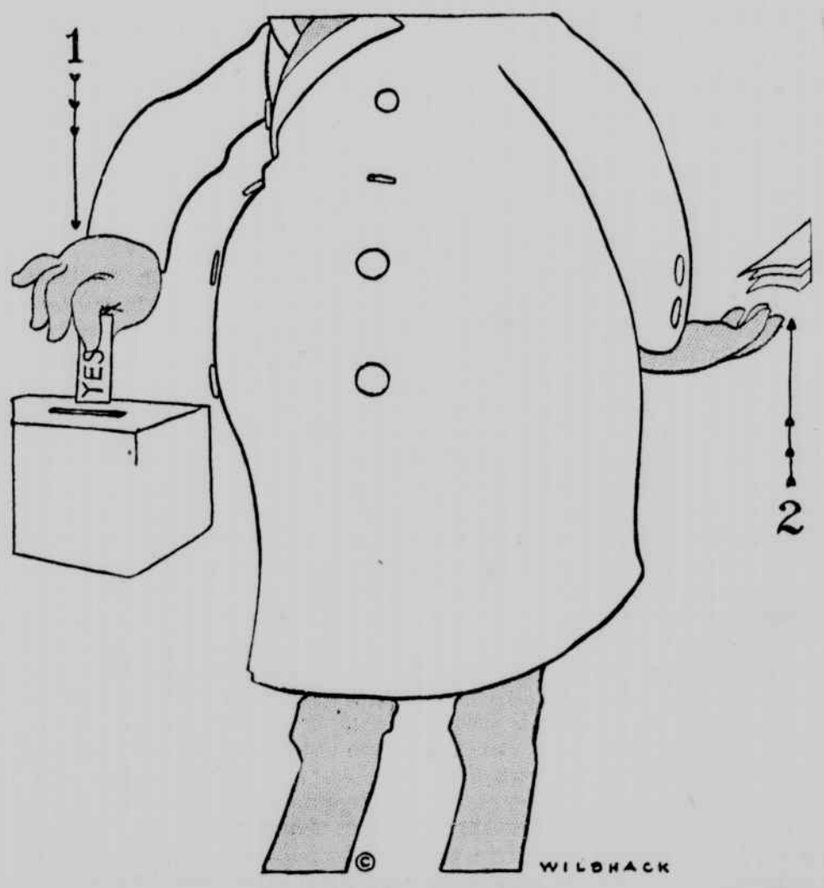
"Suppose, captain, that when you got outside the protecting waters of the United States, a destroyer came at you so quickly that you could not submerge. What would you do? Surrender?"

"I don't know," he replied. He flushed, hesitated, seemed even flabbergasted that the question should be raised. Then he added: "I can't discuss that. The moment would bring its own decision."

It is interesting, though, to speculate upon this contingency. The Deutschland has been declared officially a merchant craft by the United States Government. The Allied diplomats say she is "potentially a vessel of war" and navy experts conclude that she could not be turned to a man-o'-war without extensive structural changes. Captain Koenig contends that as his vessel is a merchantman, engaged in lawful trade, an enemy warship would have no right to sink her on sight, but only after visit and search and a chance for the officers and crew to save their lives.

That is the theory of international law on the point, but it must be remembered that merchantmen which try to escape visit and search become a legitimate target. It is also possible that an enemy ship sighting the Deutschland would expect the latter to disappear quickly under the surface and immediately fire upon her. The difficulty of deciding between a merchant submarine and a war submarine is obvious, and surface craft have a wholesome respect for submarine torpedoes.

HOW TO MAKE MONEY By Robert J. Wildhack



XI.—THE PUBLIC SERVANT.

There's a special type of talent that is always well rewarded;
Its field is in the alcoves of our legislative halls;
By the time your term is ended you'll have quite a nest-egg hoarded,
If you can vote the way your well-known sense of Business calls.

1—Necessary Labor.
2—Official Prerogatives, and incentives toward a better understanding of Financial Problems.